NATION

9 explosives firm directors held

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BUSINESS

Investors' wealth erodes by Rs 6.59L cr as mkts tumble

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SPORTS

Sindhu set to miss All England C'ships; Lakshya ready for fight

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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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WAR ENGULFS WEST ASIA

US & Israel bombard Iran; Saudi oil refinery hit; Kuwait 'mistakenly' shoots 3 US jets

TEHRAN/ WASHINGTON DC/ TEL AVIV, 2 MARCH

Iran fired missiles at Israel, Arab states and US military targets around the region on Monday. At the same time, Israel and the United States carried out heavy strikes on Tehran, widening the war to several fronts.

At least 555 people have been killed in Iran, according to the Iranian Red Crescent Society, with more than 130 cities reportedly hit. Eleven people have died in Israel and 31 in Lebanon.

The rising death toll, the widespread bombing, and the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, suggest the conflict could become a long war with no clear end.

West Asia on boil

Tehran had long warned that any attack on its territory would trigger retaliation across the region. On Monday, sirens sounded in Dubai and Bahrain as Iranian projectiles approached. Both Bahrain and Kuwait said strikes hit civilian sites outside US bases. The UAE said most missiles and drones were intercepted.

Meanwhile, US Central Command said Kuwait had "mistakenly shot down" three American F-15E Strike Eagles while targeting Iranian aircraft. All six pilots ejected safely and were reported stable.

Targeting energy sources

In Saudi Arabia, drones targeted the Aramco's Ras Tanura oil refinery near Dammam, one of the world's largest, capable of processing more than 5,00,000 barrels a day. The drones were intercepted but falling debris reportedly sparked a massive fire. The facility was shut as a precaution. In Kuwait, debris from downed drones fell on the Ahmadi refinery, injuring two workers.

QatarEnergy announced it was halting liquefied natural gas production, without giving a timeline for resumption, removing one of the world's leading LNG suppliers from the market. Hundreds of thousands of airline passengers were stranded worldwide as airspace closed, and oil prices surged sharply.

Iran has also reportedly closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of globally traded oil passes, and several vessels have been attacked.

No talks with US

Senior Iranian official Ali Larijani said on social media that Iran would not negotiate with the US. Israel and Washington said they had bombed key Iranian sites, claiming to have destroyed naval headquarters and several warships. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said their latest barrage, using Kheibar missiles, targeted the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the headquarters of the Israeli air force commander.

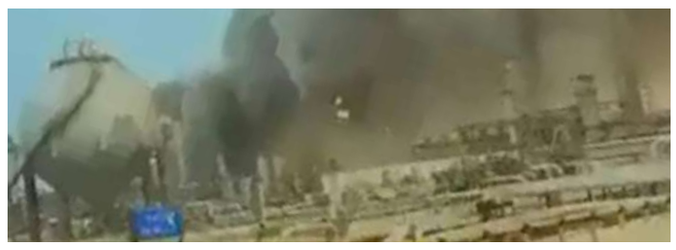
'War to go on for 4 weeks'

US President Donald Trump vowed to "avenge" four American troops killed in Kuwait and warned that further casualties were likely. Urging Iranians to "take over" their government, he said the campaign could last around four weeks.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth insisted the operation had a "clear, devastating, decisive mission" to destroy Iran's missile threat, dismantle its navy and ensure there were "no nukes". "This is not Iraq. This is not endless," he said, alongside Air Force Gen Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the administration's first press briefing since the strikes began.

In Europe, French President Emmanuel Macron said France would allow the temporary deployment of its nuclear-armed aircraft to allied countries such as Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer confirmed he had accepted a US request to use British military bases for strikes on Iran. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Pgs 2, 3, 5, 6, 7



Clockwise from top: Israekli air strikes hits Lebanon's Dahiyeh on Monday; An Iranian drone hits Aramco's Ras Tanura oil refinery in Saudi Arabia; Three US fighter jets were shot down by Kuwaiti air defences in what the Pentagon described as an 'apparent friendly fire' incident—*PTI*

555 KILLED
in 130 cities across Iran.

- US General Dan Caine says they have hit 1,000 targets in Iran.
- US says it is its mission to destroy Iran's navy and missiles.
- PM Keir Starmer says US can use UK military bases.

TRUMP SAYS WAR TO LAST 4-5 WEEKS

Indian airlines cancelled more than 300 international flights.

"This is not Iraq. This (Iran war) is not endless"

—Pete Hegseth, Defence Secretary

SC takes cognisance of courts using AI for verdicts

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Taking cognisance of a trial court relying on alleged non-existing verdicts that were generated with the help of artificial intelligence (AI), the Supreme Court has said a decision based on such fake judgments would not be an error in decision making but would amount to misconduct. A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradhe has said it will examine the matter in detail and issued a notice to Attorney General R Venkataramani, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and the Bar Council. The issue cropped up before the apex court while it was hearing a plea challenging a January order of the Andhra High Court that came on a suit filed for an injunction. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

HC flays court for staying Youth Cong Chief's bail

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

In a relief to Indian Youth Congress president Uday Bhanu Chib, the Delhi High Court on Monday stayed a sessions court order that had stayed his bail in the AI summit protest case. A bench of Justice Saurabh Banerjee was hearing a petition filed by the counsel of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) chief challenging the sessions court order, which had stayed a magistrate court order granting bail to Chib. "Some application of mind has to be there. If there is no application of mind, the order has to be stayed," the high court said. It noted that the sessions court order was not clear in its findings while putting a stay and calling it a "rare and exceptional" case. "Where is reasoning in this order? You see page one. Turn over the page. Where is reasoning or finding?" Justice Banerjee asked. *—PTI*

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1 Indian killed as oil tanker hit near Oman coast

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

An Indian national was killed on Monday when an explosive-laden boat struck an oil tanker off the coast of Muscat Governorate. Maritime Security Centre reported that the MKD VYOM oil tanker was attacked by an unmanned boat.

The attack sparked a fire and an explosion in the main engine room, resulting in the death of one Indian crew member. The remaining 21 crew members had already been evacuated.

State-run Oman News reported that the evacuated crew included 16 Indians, four Bangladeshi and a Ukrainian national.

A day earlier, the oil tanker MV Skylight came under attack in the Strait of Hormuz, injuring four crew members. The vessel's crew consisted of 15 Indian and five Iranian nationals. On Monday, the Indian mission in Oman confirmed it is coordinating with local authorities on search operations for missing crew members.

The Strait of Hormuz lies between Oman and Iran and is a key oil chokepoint. *—PTI*

Modi talks to Bibi, MBS and Bahrain king

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke on Monday with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu to convey India's concerns over the volatile situation in West Asia following recent military strikes.

The Israeli leader thanked Modi for "standing with Israel, standing with the Jews" in their fight against Iran.

The strikes on Iran came two days after Modi concluded a two day visit to Israel from 25–26 February.

Modi also held telephonic conversations on Monday with Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the King of Bahrain, and Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, condemning recent attacks on their countries as violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity. In messages on X, the prime minister stressed that the earliest restoration of regional peace and stability was of "utmost importance".

He thanked both leaders for their care of the large Indian expatriate communities in their countries during these difficult times. Around 9 million Indians reside across the Gulf and West Asia, including some 10,000 in Iran and more than 40,000 in Israel. *—PTI*

No petrol, diesel price hike in India

International oil prices surged nearly 9 per cent following US and Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliatory attacks, with Brent crude nearing USD 80 per barrel and US crude at USD 72.79. Despite higher global rates, retail petrol and diesel prices in India are unlikely to rise immediately, sources said, as the government maintains a calibrated policy to shield consumers. Fuel prices have been frozen since April 2022, with state-owned firms absorbing fluctuations. Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri reviewed the situation amid Middle East tensions threatening supply via the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for India's crude imports.

Centre ready to evacuate citizens soon

Centre on Monday said it is in touch with Indian missions in the Gulf to ensure the safe return of stranded nationals. The Civil Aviation Ministry said IndiGo will operate 10 special relief flights from Jeddah on 3 March to Hyderabad, Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad, subject to approvals and airspace conditions, in coordination with the Indian Consulate. The Cabinet Committee on Security, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, reviewed the situation and directed support measures. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi said India is prepared to evacuate citizens.

India, Canada seal $2.6B uranium deal

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

India and Canada on Monday signed agreements on supplies of uranium and other critical minerals and vowed to conclude a comprehensive economic partnership agreement, with Prime Minister Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney finalising a new framework to strengthen ties including taking bilateral annual trade to $50 billion by 2030.

The two leaders also pledged to ramp up cooperation in defence, critical technologies, developing small and modular nuclear reactors, education and renewable energy as Modi said the relations between the two countries are now filled with a new energy and positivity.

Canada will support India's civil nuclear energy sector as per the $2.6 billion uranium supply agreement.

Modi said that both sides agreed that terrorism and radicalisation are serious challenges not only for India and Canada but for all humanity. "Our close cooperation against these is crucial for global peace," he said.

Modi and Carney also discussed West Asia and Modi said that India supports the resolution of all conflicts through dialogue.

"The situation in West Asia is a matter of concern for us. We will work with all countries to ensure the safety of Indians in the region," the prime minister said in his media statement. The major results of the Modi-Carney talks were their decision to expand trade, a move that comes amid Canada's increasingly frosty economic ties with the Trump administration. The move to strengthen ties came after ties came under strain due to the row over the killing of a Khalistani activist in 2023. *— PTI*

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2,600 EVACUATED

Toxic gas leaks from M'rashtra factory

PALGHAR, 2 MARCH

A massive leak of the hazardous oleum gas at a chemical unit in Maharashtra's Palghar on Monday led to the evacuation of over 2,600 people, including 1,600 schoolkids.

The oleum (fuming sulphuric acid) gas leak affected areas in a five-kilometre radius of the unit of Bhageria Industries Ltd in the Boisar MIDC locality on Mumbai's outskirts and led to the evacuation as a precautionary measure, officials said.

The leak created a dense cloud of white fumes that spread rapidly due to wind velocity, causing panic among residents in the industrial belt. The cause of the gas leak was not known. Palghar collector Indu Rani Jakhar said disaster management plan was activated immediately.

The authorities ordered the evacuation of 1,600 students from the Tarapur Vidyamandir. Over 1,000 workers from Bhageria Industries were moved to safety.

A policeman wears a gas mask on duty in the leak area —*PTI*

The high smoke concentration in affected areas obstructed rescue teams from reaching the exact location of the leak.

Chemical experts from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and National Disaster Response Force personnel eventually located the source and entered the premises using self-contained breathing apparatus. To suppress the fumes, responders have deployed sandbags around the leaking tank. At least three persons have suffered minor eye irritation and were receiving treatment at hospitals.

- The leak created a dense cloud of white fumes that spread rapidly due to winds, causing panic among residents in the industrial belt. The cause of the gas leak is not known

Palghar SP Yatish Deshmukh, who was at the leakage site, asked the villagers not to panic as authorities were taking steps to deal with the situation. Jakhar appealed to people to stay indoors and follow instructions given by the administration. *—PTI*

'No records whether Sambhal mosque built on vacant land'

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has informed the Central Information Commission (CIC) that it holds no records regarding whether the Jama Masjid in Sambhal was built on vacant land or by demolishing an earlier structure, nor documents identifying the landowner at the time of its construction.

In response to an RTI filed by Satya Prakash Yadav, the ASI also stated that information on past disputes, new constructions, or the nature of structures when the site was taken under protection is unavailable.

On the mosque's current status, the ASI confirmed, "At present, it exists as a mosque."

The Sambhal Jama Masjid has been the subject of legal disputes over claims it was built on an ancient Hindu temple, attracting attention after riots on 24 November, 2024 during stir against a court-ordered ASI survey. *—PTI*

CM snooping on DKS loyalists using intel: BJP leader

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Senior BJP leader R Ashoka said that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has asked Intelligence agencies to track the moves of MLAs supporting Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. He said the CM uses Intelligence agencies to snoop on rivals within his party. "So now, Intelligence has a new job. That is tracking the dinner attendance of DyCM DK Shivakumar's faction," Ashoka, who is the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, said in a post on 'X' on Monday. He said that although narcotic factories are operating unchecked and law and order has been derailed, the government's priority is counting MLAs. "The state machinery's job is to protect the people of Karnataka, not protect your chair," Ashoka said. He also took a dig at Congress MP Rahul Gandhi. Siddaramaiah must stop misusing state intelligence, he said.—PTI

Man killed in bike accident in Hubballi

HUBBALLI, 2 MARCH

A 23-year-old man died and another was injured after the motorcycle they were travelling on crashed into a roadside milestone in Hubballi district, police said on Monday. Nagaraj, a resident of Janglipete in Old Hubballi, died on the spot, they said. The accident occurred near Kusugal village late Sunday night. According to police, the two youths were travelling on a motorcycle to visit Shri Ramalingeshwara Kamanna Temple in Navalagund when Nagaraj, who was riding the two-wheeler, reportedly lost control and crashed into a roadside milestone. Due to the impact, he died on the spot, while the pillion rider, identified as Sagar, sustained serious injuries and was admitted to a hospital. Police said an investigation is underway. —*PTI*

City techie builds app to map Tabebuia trees

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

A Bengaluru techie has created Bengaluru Bloom to map the City's iconic pink Tabebuia blooms in detail, and it has become popular online. What started as a hobby of photographing the City's seasonal pink trees turned into a mapping project. Malavika, the creator, shared her idea on X, explaining she would photograph the trees whenever she saw them. She researched and mapped around 27,000 Tabebuia rosea trees across Bengaluru. The map shows dense clusters of pink markers, especially in certain neighbourhoods, transforming parts of the city into a blossom-filled scene. The project has been widely loved by people, with several users praising the idea and sharing their own photos. The project is also being seen as a useful tool for planning scenic walks and driveways around Bengaluru during the bloom season —*AGENCIES*

Zaheer Khan leads training camp for young seamers

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Zaheer Khan led a specialised red-ball training camp at the Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCIs) Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Bengaluru. This camp aimed to hone the skills of young fast bowlers under the high-performance monitoring programme, focusing on technical skills, mental toughness, and physical conditioning. "With this camp laying emphasis on red ball bowling, these players worked closely with the stalwart on technical skills and also heard first hand from him on developing other facets that are required... in cricket," BCCI said.Zaheer was part of the Indian team that won the 2002 ICC Champions Trophy and the 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup. Zaheer was the joint-highest wicket-taker in the 2011 World Cup. He is the sixth-most successful bowler in the country. —*ANI*

CM writes to PM evacuate Indians from West Asia

109 Kannadigas are currently stranded in Dubai & Bahrain

BENGALURU, MARCH 2

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah *PHOTO: PTI*

Siddaramaiah on Monday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to initiate evacuation preparedness, step up diplomatic outreach and establish an inter-ministerial mechanism to safeguard Kannadigas and other Indians amid escalating geopolitical tensions in parts of West Asia.

According to the Chief Minister's Office, 109 people from Karnataka are currently stranded in the region. Of them, 100 are in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, while nine are in Bahrain.

Meanwhile, around 50 pilgrims from Bengaluru who travelled to Medina in Saudi are stranded. The group, which includes women, toddlers and elderly people, was scheduled to return to India at 2am on 2 March. However, their flight was cancelled, leaving them stuck and struggling to manage accommodation and expenses.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Siddaramaiah expressed grave concern over the rapidly evolving security situation, which has led to flight cancellations and widespread uncertainty for residents, workers, students and travellers from Karnataka and across India.

Referring to recent advisories issued by the Ministry of Civil Aviation regarding airspace restrictions and Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) declared by several West Asian countries, he said a large number of Kannadigas and other Indian nationals have been stranded, particularly in major transit hubs such as the UAE, including Dubai.

"The evolving security environment, including hostilities and civilian airspace closures, has generated widespread uncertainty and distress among affected individuals and their families in Karnataka and across India," he said.

Given the fluid situation, the Chief Minister urged the Centre to enhance engagement through Indian embassies and consulates for continuous monitoring and protection of Indian nationals. He called for preparedness to launch priority evacuation or special repatriation flights, if required, and sought the creation of an inter-ministerial task force to streamline coordination between the Ministries of External Affairs and Civil Aviation, state governments and airlines.

He also proposed a centralised digital mechanism for registration, tracking and real-time advisories, and sought directions to airlines to offer flexible schedules, waive extra charges and extend humanitarian assistance.

Siddaramaiah said the State Emergency Operations Centre and all district centres have been activated-the-clock, with senior nodal officers liaising with Union authorities.

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said the State is in contact with the Ministry of External Affairs. The Centre has indicated that flights are currently suspended, but arrangements, special or regular, will be made once air traffic resumes, he added. —*PTI*

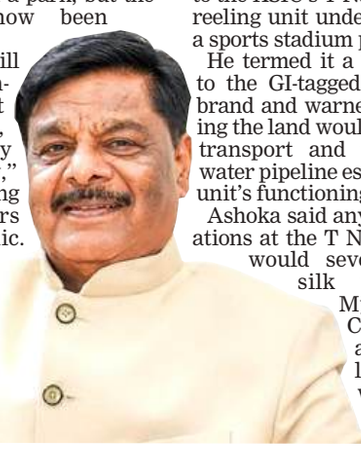
'BJP CREATING CONFUSION'

Won't shut Mysuru silk factory to build stadium: Minister

MYSURU, 2 MARCH

Minister HC Mahadevappa asserted on Monday that there is no question of closing the silk factory in T Narsipura and accused the BJP of "creating confusion" over the issue.

Responding to the criticism by the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, R Ashoka, he said the government had earlier decided to allocate one-and-a-half acres, which was being used for the silk market, for the development of a park, but the order has now been reviewed.



"A stadium will not be constructed on that land. For us, the silk factory is the priority," he said, adding that workers need not panic. He said the government's priority is the silk factory and it is its responsibility to ensure that no harm comes to the unit.

Mahadevappa said he held a meeting with sports and silk department officials and, if found absolutely necessary, the proposal to construct a stadium on the land will be dropped.

Earlier, Ashoka had alleged on social media that the Congress government was attempting to take over five acres of buffer land belonging to the KSIC's T Narsipura yarn reeling unit under the guise of a sports stadium project.

He termed it a "direct blow" to the GI-tagged Mysore Silk brand and warned that diverting the land would disrupt coal transport and the Cauvery water pipeline essential for the unit's functioning.

Ashoka said any halt in operations at the T Narsipura unit would severely impact silk weaving in Mysuru and Channapatna and affect livelihoods of workers in the state. —*Salar News*

FOR BETTER PAY

Members of the Karnataka State Akshara Dasoha Midday Meal Workers Association protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Monday, demanding minimum wages for women midday meal workers -*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Govt to give free dentures to BPL card holders above 45 years

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

The Department of Health and Family Welfare has launched the 'Danta Bhagya' scheme to help elderly people. The scheme has been launched to help elders overcome eating difficulties due to dental problems.

The government's objective is to provide free dentures to everyone aged above 45 who has a BPL card. This will help to eliminate the malnutrition seen among senior citizens and enable them to enjoy their preferred foods.

The scheme is being implemented in collaboration with 44 dental medical colleges and 13 district hospitals across the state. So far 41,218 elders in the State have benefited from this scheme. —*Agencies*

SWR achieves gross revenue of Rs 8,550 cr in FY 2025-26

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

A statement released by the South Western Railway (SWR) on Monday says it has achieved an overall gross revenue of Rs 8,550 crore during the financial year 2025-26 up to February, registering a growth of 14.31 per cent over the corresponding period of the previous year.

SWR freight revenue emerged as the major contributor, reaching Rs 4,876 crore, reflecting a significant growth of 18.27 per cent, while passenger revenue increased to Rs 3,154 crore, registering a growth of 9.25 per cent.

In February 2026 alone, SWR earned a gross revenue of Rs 780 crore, registering a growth of 7.25 per cent compared to last year. According to SWR, passenger revenue for the month stood at Rs 307 crore, showing a growth of 14.5 per cent, with 13.66 million passengers travelling across the zone. Freight revenue during the month reached Rs 415 crore, supported by improved freight loading performance. Commercial sundry revenue also recorded a notable rise to Rs 26.38 crore, while ticket checking earnings increased to Rs 6.32 crore.

On the freight operations front, SWR loaded 47.5 million tonnes (MT) of originating freight during the financial year up to February 2026 compared to 40.6 MT in the previous year, registering a strong growth of 17 per cent. Commodity-wise, iron ore loading reached 19 MT (growth of 10.7 per cent), steel loading increased to 9.8 MT (growth of 35.9 per cent) while coal loading improved to 9.3 MT, registering a growth of 16.6 per cent.

During February 2026, SWR loaded 4.26 MT of originating freight, marking a 5.3 per cent increase over last year. Steel loading touched 0.89 MT, achieving the Best Ever February performance, while coal loading rose to 0.90 MT with a growth of 19.6 per cent, it added. —*PTI*

B'luru man stabbed to death by live-in partner & friends, 3 held

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

A man was stabbed to death by his live-in partner and her associates in Manjunath Nagar in Bengaluru, police said on Monday

The incident occurred on 27 February when the deceased, Mohan Rao was stabbed multiple times by his live-in partner, Bindu and her associates Vinay and Dhanush Gowda, at the couple's rented house in Manjunath Nagar.

Rao, in his 40s, was engaged in financing two-wheelers,and some small-scale businesses. He had separated from his wife and was residing with Bindu, who had also separated from her husband from an earlier marriage.

Bindu has also acted in films such as 'Bhajarangi' and 'Police Quarters'.

The three accused have been arrested and are currently in police custody. They are being interrogated. Deputy commissioner of police (Northwest) Nagesh DL said that a case of murder was registered and the police are probing the incident. About two to three months ago, Rao and Bindu had told the owner of their rented house that they were a couple. Later, Bindu developed a close friendship with Vinay, a lorry driver and the two decided to get married. Since Rao created obstruction in their marriage, the trio planned to murder him.

"The accused made Rao consume alcohol and then stabbed him with a knife.

They also suffocated him by covering his mouth and nose with plastic, finally managing to kill him," DCP Nagesh said. Investigations revealed that Bindu and her partners had forced Mohan Rao to take Viagra and stabbed him multiple times when he resisted. —*PTI*

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Man kills wife, then kills himself near Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

A man died by suicide after allegedly killing his wife following a quarrel at a rented house on the outskirts of Bengaluru, police said on Monday.

Deepantha Sabara, 31 and his wife Manjula Sabara, 27, hailed from Odisha. The couple was working at a private company in Bommasandra.

The incident, which occurred in Anekal taluk, came to light on 26 February. The bodies were found in a decomposed state, indicating that the deaths had occurred earlier.

According to police, owner of the house, Shivakumar, had rented out the house to the couple 20 days ago. On that day Shivakumar's mother went to check on them and saw the body of a woman on the couch. After an argument the husband allegedly thrashed and punched her, leading to her death. Later, he also hanged himself at home.

Police found a mobile phone in which the husband had recorded a selfie video of himself crying in front of his wife's body. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support. —*PTI*

2.30 LAKH CHILDREN AFFECTED

Parents of pre-primary students seek 90-day age cut-off relaxation

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

A group of parents representing over 2.30 lakh children has sought a 90-day relaxation in the Class 1 age cut-off criteria from the State government to prevent children from losing an academic year.

In November 2022, the Karnataka government raised the minimum age for Class 1 admission to six years as of 1 June, replacing the earlier criterion of 5 years and 5 months with a 60-day relaxation.

As such children who were admitted to pre-primary education have become ineligible for promotion to Class 1 if they fall short of the new age requirement.

As such over 2.30 lakh children admitted in 2022 are now have to repeat UKG or Montessori-3 despite having completed three to four years of pre-primary education.

Parents claimed these children were born during the Covid-19 pandemic, a period marked by uncertainty and disruption and they should not be burdened with additional procedural hurdles. They further highlight concerns over cognitive and psychological impact.

The parents will also have to bear the cost of an additional year of schooling.

In 2023, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced that the state would implement a State Education Policy (SEP). Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa said that the SEP would be implemented from 2026-27.

A relaxation of nearly six to seven months was granted to the previous batch. The parents urge the government to grant a 90-day relaxation in the Grade 1 age cut-off.

Most schools closed Class 1 admissions by March 2026 and are currently awaiting government orders.

The parents have also submitted petitions to those concerned. —*PTI*

IMPLEMENT SEP
90 DAYS RELAXATION
WITH
COMPASSION & CLARITY
I DON'T WANT TO READ THE SAME BOOKS
LET ME MOVE AHEAD WITH MY FRIENDS!
PARENTS TRUSTED THE SYSTEM

Over 2.30 lakh students admitted in 2022 will now have to repeat UGC or Montessori-3 despite having completed three to fours years of pre-primary education -*MOHAMMED ASAD*

— PTI

Ajit Pawar's son seeks VSR owner's arrest

PUNE, 2 MARCH

Jay Pawar, son of Maharashtra's late Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, has shared a video on social media alleging that VSR Ventures owner Rohit Singh was seen dozing off in the chief pilot's seat during a flight, and demanded his immediate arrest. Sharing the clip on a social media platform, Jay Pawar on Sunday stated, "We lost our father...this pain will stay with us for a lifetime. In this video, Rohit Singh, owner of VSR, is seen asleep in the chief pilot's seat during the flight. Such negligence while the aircraft is in the air is unacceptable. This is extremely serious and shocking." He demanded grounding of all VSR aircraft till the inquiry into his father's death was over. —*PTI*

— PTI

SIR to begin in Jharkhand in April: CEO

RANCHI, 2 MARCH

Jharkhand Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) K Ravi Kumar on Monday said the SIR of electoral rolls will begin in the state in April. He added that the exercise will be completed in a single phase. "According to directions received from the Election Commission, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) will begin in the state in April, and all preparations have been completed," Kumar told reporters in Ranchi. He said the exercise was conducted in Bihar in Phase-1, followed by 12 states and Union Territories in Phase-2. Kumar further said the Chief Electoral Office and the University of Jharkhand will jointly organise a two-day international conference on 'voter registration and voter registers' on 2 September. —*PTI*

Missing BLO's body found in Yamuna in UP

KAUSHAMBI, 2 MARCH

The body of Krishna Kumar Verma, a 50-year-old assistant teacher on SIR duty, was recovered from the Yamuna River here on Monday. Verma, a resident of Dharampur village in Sarai Akil, had been missing for five days. He worked at a primary school in Kanaili and was also a Booth Level Officer for the ongoing SIR of electoral rolls. Verma left for Kanaili village on 25 February, and when he did not return, his family lodged a missing person complaint. Fishermen spotted his body near Mahila Ghat. The Kaushambi SHO said the body has been sent for post-mortem, and further investigation is underway. —*PTI*

RSS calls for global peace, says battles should be for good

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The RSS on Monday urged peace worldwide, stating battles should only occur for the good of humanity and truth, not for selfish reasons. RSS spokesperson Sunil Ambekar expressed concern over Indians stranded abroad amid West Asia conflicts. He said, "Wars are happening. It would certainly be good if there is a peaceful resolution. India always wants peace and progress in the world." Ambekar added, "If there is a battle, it should be for the good of humanity and truth." He highlighted the safety concerns of Indians stranded due to the conflict and called for their early relief. The Cabinet Committee on Security reviewed the situation and directed measures to assist affected Indian nationals. —*PTI*

J&K on the boil over Khamenei's killing

14 people were injured; Internet service disrupted as protests continue unabated

People from the Muslim Shia community protest in Pulwama's Gangoo and Srinagar against the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israel strikes, on Monday —*PTI*

SRINAGAR, 2 MARCH

At least 14 people, including six security personnel, were injured on the second day of protests that erupted in Jammu and Kashmir following the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a joint US-Israeli attack, officials said.

Authorities have imposed restrictions to curb people's movement, shut down education institutes and throttled mobile internet speeds in the Union territory as precautionary measures.e killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a joint US-Israeli attack rocked Jammu and Kashmir for the second consecutive day on Monday, forcing authorities to curb people's movement, shut down education institutes and throttle mobile internet speeds as precautionary measures.

According to officials, 75 rallies were held at various places in the Kashmir Valley, while a few demonstrations were held in the Jammu region as well. Security forces had to use mild force to disperse the protesters in some areas.

Officials said protests broke out in Bemina, Gund Hassibhat, and Jehangir Chowk areas of Srinagar city and in the Pulwama town of south Kashmir, all of which have a large Shia population, as agitators marched through the streets, raising anti-US and anti-Israel slogans.

Severe restrictions have been placed on the movement of people in parts of Kashmir. The curbs have been imposed against the backdrop of a call for a one-day strike given by Mutahida Majlis-e-Ulama (MMU) chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. He urged people to observe the strike "with unity, dignity, and in peace".

Kashmir -- which has about 15 lakh Shias -- witnessed major protests at Lal Chowk, Saida Kadal, Budgam, Bandipora, Anantnag and Pulwama on Sunday.

Mobile internet speeds were throttled across Kashmir on Monday, in the wake of spontaneous protests against Khamenei's killing as a precautionary measure to maintain law and order, officials said.

Police have issued an advisory urging all media organisations and news platforms to exercise the highest level of responsibility and professionalism in their reporting.

The Ghanta Ghar at Lal Chowk was sealed with barricades erected, while police and paramilitary CRPF personnel were deployed across the city. —*PTI*

'KEEP AN EYE ON PRO-IRAN RADICALS'

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The Union Home Ministry has asked states to keep an eye on pro-Iran radical preachers giving inflammatory statements that may result in violence in the wake of the Israel-US attack on Iran, officials said.

In a letter circulated to all states on February 28, the Ministry also asked all states and UTs to keep vigil on social media activities of extremists and global terror group handles, they said.

Advising the states to ensure that no law-and-order issues arise, the ministry has asked the states to heighten vigilance, as global events might have a domestic ripple effect through rhetorical statements, they said.

The circular asked the states to increase security at consulates, embassies, and other diplomatic offices of the USA and Israel in their jurisdictions, and at other entities of the two countries to prevent any untoward incident and maintain peace and tranquillity.

Shia mourners had earlier taken to streets across states in India on Sunday. —*PTI*

Flights to W Asia suspended; refunds offered

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Major airlines including IndiGo, Akasa Air, Qatar Airways and Emirates, on Monday suspended flights to and from West Asia amid ongoing regional tensions, offering passengers with waivers and refunds.

IndiGo announced on X on Monday that it has continued to meticulously evaluate the evolving regional developments and their potential impact on flight operations and is taking the course that it believes is most responsible for its guests, given the priority of safety.

The airline is extending full flexibility and waivers for travel to and from select cities, along with other impacted Air flights to international sectors until 7 March for bookings made on or before 28 February.

Akasa Air announced suspension of all flights to and from Jordan, Doha, Kuwait and Riyadh for 3 March.

For all bookings made to or from these cities until 7 March, passengers may opt for a full refund or reschedule their travel at no additional cost.

Qatar Airways also announced that its flight operations remain temporarily suspended due to the closure of Qatari airspace.

Emirates announced the temporary suspension of all operations to and from Dubai up until 3pm on 3 March.

For customers booked to travel in its flights before or on 5 March, they can rebook on an alternate flight for travel on or before 20 March or request a full refund. —*ANI*

BRAINSTORMING

All India Congress Committee (AICC) Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan called on Indian National Congress (INC) National Treasurer and Rajya Sabha MP Ajay Maken in New Delhi on Monday. Both the leaders had a meaningful discussion on ways to further strengthen the organisation and about the upcoming initiatives. He expressed his gratitude to the senior Congress leader for his guidance and continued support. PHOTO: SALAR

Shah kicks off 'Parivartan Yatra' in WB ahead of polls

MATHURAPUR, MAR 2

Union Home Minister Amit Shah during BJP's Parivartan Yatra Sabha in West Bengal —*PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday launching the BJP's 'Parivartan Yatra' from Mathurapur in South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal vowed to remove infiltrators from the state if voted to power in the state in the coming assembly elections.

In his first visit since the publication of the post-SIR rolls on Saturday, Shah sought to draw a clear distinction between "infiltrators" and "Hindu refugees", assuring the latter that they have "nothing to worry" and would not lose citizenship under a BJP government.

Further escalating the BJP's "infiltration" pitch in West Bengal, he declared that while "only names are being deleted now" from the state's electoral rolls under the SIR, infiltrators would be "removed from the state" once the party comes to power, raising the stakes ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls.

The Union minister slammed the TMC government over what he described as years of unchecked infiltration under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's watch, signalling that border security and citizenship will anchor the BJP's final electoral push in the run-up to 2026.

Launching a frontal attack against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Amit Shah said the aim of the yatra was not to capture power. "Mamata Didi says our Poriborton Yatra is about capturing power.

I want to tell her that for us, change does not mean the chief minister's chair. For us, change means freeing West Bengal from infiltrators, from corruption, securing the borders, ensuring the safety of mothers and sisters, and establishing the rule of law," the Union Minister said. —*PTI*

AI-generated verdicts will be considered misconduct: SC

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Artificial judgments will have consequences, the Supreme Court has warned, coming down hard on a trial court for relying on fake, AI-generated verdicts for decision making.

Orders based on fictitious judgments will not be seen just as an error in decision-making but will be considered as judicial misconduct, the SC said in a warning that comes at a time when the use of AI is spreading to areas where it is not authorised.

Justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradhe issued a notice to Attorney General R Venkataramani, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and the Bar Council of India.

The court also appointed senior advocate Shyam Divan to assist it in the matter.

"We take cognisance of the trial court using AI-generated fake judgments," the bench said in its 27 February order.

The issue came before the SC while it was hearing a plea challenging a January order of the Andhra HC.

The SC noted that the trial court had appointed an advocate-commissioner to enquire about the disputed property.

The bench pointed out that the petitioners had challenged the advocate-commissioner's report.

It noted that the trial court had dismissed the objections relying on certain judgments. The petitioners challenged the order, contending that the verdicts referred to were fake.

The SC noted that the HC had considered the objection and realised that the judgments were fake. The HC then dismissed the civil revision petition, affirming the decision of the trial court.

The petitioners then moved the SC, challenging the HC order. —*PTI*

WAITING FOR EVACUATION

Families await children's return from Iran

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Many students who went to Iran to study in colleges are caught in the thick of the ongong battle between the US-Iran and Israel —*PTI*

Kunwar Shakeel broke down in tears as he explained how his daughter, who went to Iran to study medicine, is now stuck in the war-torn country and has no idea when she will be able to return.

"We spoke to her on Monday morning. There was a bomb blast near her college," the 49-year-old told PTI while sobbing on the phone.

The daughter of Shakeel, an Old Delhi resident, studies in the Islamic Azad University in Tehran.

Shakeel said that his daughter was supposed to board a plane to India on Tuesday but is now waiting for evacuation.

According to officials, thousands of Indians studying in Iran are currently waiting for evacuation as the situation has turned into a full-scale military conflict.

For many parents, the developments are scary and they are stuck in limbo as phone and internet connectivity has almost died.

"My daughter has to try at least 40 times before a call gets connected," Zubiya Khan, a resident of Malviya Nagar whose daughter is studying in Tehran, told PTI.

Parents said their only hope is the Indian government now, and they are praying that their children are rescued soon.

Parents also informed that Indian students are surviving on a limited food ration.

Momin Khan, national representative of the All India Medical Association and the President of its Jammu and Kashmir chapter, said at 7am local time on Tuesday, students from various colleges have been instructed by the Indian embassy to move to safer locations. —*PTI*

EC's full bench to visit WB to discuss poll plans

KOLKATA, 2 MARCH

The Election Commission is likely to send its full bench to West Bengal, with Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar leading the delegation on a two-day visit beginning 9 March.

A meeting is scheduled for 10 March as part of the commission's preparations ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections in the state. If the situation remains unchanged, the poll schedule is likely to be announced later this month, an official said.

Meanwhile, the commission has rescheduled its meeting with central agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation, Income Tax Department, National Investigation Agency, Narcotics Control Bureau and central armed forces.

Earlier, a team of around eight officials, including the deputy election commissioner, was scheduled to visit the state on Sunday. However, it was postponed following a request from the state government. State Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal had said that a cricket match between India and West Indies, ongoing CBSE and ICSE examinations, & the DoI festival on 3 March necessitated rescheduling. —*PTI*

Man murdered in Delhi, dumped in Yamuna, 4 held

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

In a grisly case driven by greed, a man was killed, dismembered, and his body dumped in the Yamuna River after he refused to pay money. Police arrested four suspects, including a woman, on 18 February. The accused, Happy alias Suraj, 29, befriended Anroop Gupta, 48 nearly a year ago, noting his gold ornaments and separation from family. On 18 February, Happy and associates beat Gupta, demanding money, and later stabbed him to death. Happy then cut the body into pieces, packed them in plastic bags, and disposed of them in the Yamuna. Investigations revealed the victim was lured to an apartment before being murdered. —*PTI*

— WIKIPEDIA

Ex-RS Member Waghmare dies at 91

LATUR, 2 MARCH

Renowned educationist and former Rajya Sabha member Dr Janardan Waghmare, 91, died at his residence after a brief illness. Waghmare, a close aide to Sharad Pawar, contributed significantly to education, literature, and public service, founding Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded. Born on 11 November 1934, he served as Maharashtra's Rajya Sabha MP from 2008 to 2014, and as Latur Municipal Council president (2001–2006). Waghmare has authored around 80 books and received the Maharashtra Bhushan and Yashwantrao Chavan Literary awards. His last rites will be performed in his Kavtha village on Tuesday. —*PTI*

TDB to oppose women's entry in Sabarimala temple

T'PURAM, 2 MARCH

The TDB will file an affidavit before the Supreme Court to preserve existing traditions related to the entry of women of menstruating age in the Sabarimala Temple. Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president K Jayakumar said the matter regarding filing the affidavit was discussed at a board meeting and a decision was taken to maintain the current tradition. He said the board had decided that the tradition at Sabarimala regarding the entry of women should continue. He clarified that the TDB does not support the Supreme Court's 2018 decision permitting the entry of women of menstrual age at the temple. —*PTI*

— PTI

Andhra cracker unit blast toll rises to 22

VETLAPALEM, 2 MARCH

The death toll from the blast at a licensed cracker unit in Andhra Pradesh's Kakinada district has risen to 22. District Medical Officer J Narasimha Nayak confirmed one additional death on Sunday night. The incident on 28 February killed 20 people, including nine women, with nine critically injured. Several victims suffer burns, some up to 90 per cent severity. The explosion, described as powerful, caused extensive damage. Authorities continue to treat critically injured patients and investigate the cause of the blast, which has shocked the region. The toll may rise further as rescue and medical teams work to assist those affected. —*PTI*

India, Canada sign 13 agreements on education

McGill University to launch AI centre in India

NEW DELHI 2 MARCH

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announced a new partnership for developing talent in India. This includes agreements on research, hybrid campuses and centres of excellence in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

In a post on X, Carney said, "Canadian universities are launching new talent partnerships in India. We have signed 13 new agreements on research, hybrid campuses, and establishing AI centres of excellence. This will provide invaluable experience for students and strengthen our world-class universities on both sides of the Pacific."

The partnerships aim to give students international academic exposure and strengthen cooperation between institutions of both countries.

The McGill University of Canada is establishing a new Centre of Excellence in AI education and research in India. This is considered an important step in expanding the university's global presence.

In a statement the university said, "This announcement was made as part of an academic mission to India, led by Universities Canada and attended by the Prime Minister, the honourable Mark Carney, as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anita Anand."

"The Centre is scheduled for launch in May 2027 and will welcome its first batch in fall 2027, beginning with 50 students and expected to increase to approximately 200 students in due course," it added.

The Centre will offer a master's programme that combines strong academic foundations with applied learning. Students will work on projects connected to technological challenges and emerging needs in the AI sector.

The move to strengthen ties came as part of attempts by the two sides to improve relations after a diplomatic row over the killing of a Khalistani in 2023. — *PTI*

Prime Minister Modi and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney witness an MoU exchange between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand in New Delhi on Monday—*PTI*

Debris seen after the blast at an explosives manufacturing factory in Nagpur district on Sunday —*PTI*

9 explosives firm directors held

NAGPUR, 2 MARCH

The police have arrested nine directors of an explosives manufacturing company in Maharashtra's Nagpur district where a blast killed 18 persons, 2officials said on Monday.

The Kalmeshwar police here have registered a case against 21 directors and shareholders of the SBL Energy Limited under Section 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of BNS. Nine directors of the company have been arrested, the police said.

At least 18 workers were charred to death, and 24 others were injured in a blast at the detonator packing unit of SBL Energy Limited, a mining and industrial explosives manufacturer, at Raulgaon in Katol tehsil here on Sunday.

SP (Nagpur Rural) Dr Harssh Poddar on Monday said that an initial report by the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) and Directorate of Industrial Safety and Health (DISH) pointed to safety shortcomings at the company. Efforts are underway to apprehend the remaining accused, the official said.

Maharashtra minister Bawankule said that there is prima facie evidence of "negligence" on the part of SBL Energy. Accountability will also be fixed on officials of the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), the Directorate of Industrial Safety and Health (DISH) and the labour commissionerate, and if found involved, cases will be registered against them. — *PTI*

'Manjummel Boys' director booked for sexual harassment

KOCHI, 2 MARCH

A case has been registered here against Chidambaram S Poduval, the director of the superhit movie 'Manjummel Boys,' for alleged sexual harassment, police said on Monday.

Ernakulam South Police registered a case on Sunday following a complaint filed by a woman in connection with an incident that allegedly took place in 2022, officials said.

Police said the incident pertains to allegedly trespassing into the apartment of a woman in Elamkulam and sexually misbehaving with her.

The case has been registered under Sections 74 (assault or criminal force to a woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 75 (sexual harassment) of BNS, police said.

According to officials, the complainant's statement was recorded before registering the case. A notice will be issued to the filmmaker asking him to appear for questioning, they added.

Chidambaram is yet to respond to the allegations. He has directed two hit films, 'Jan.E.Man' (2021) and 'Manjummel Boys' (2024). — *PTI*

'NO MIXING OF FAITH & POLITICS'

Stalin defends stance on deepam row post PM's temple visit

CHENNAI, 2 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin defended his government's stand on the Tirupparankundram temple lamp lighting row and said personal faith should not bow down to politics.

His remarks came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Arulmighu Subrahmanya Swamy temple in Tirupparankundran and offered prayers on Sunday.

In a video message released on 1 March, when he turned 73, Stalin said his government defended its position on the Karthigai Deepam lamp lighting row on a stone pillar on Tirupparankundram hill, and said he had made a choice to safeguard the temple's tradition as a CM and not as a religious leader.

"Rationality need not be at loggerheads with faith, both are faces of society," he said in the message and claimed that the friendship between rationalist leader "Periyar" Ramasamy and Adigalar was proof of that.

Stalin was apparently referring to Kundrakudi Ponnambala Adigalar, who recently praised the DMK government for protecting temples.

After visiting the temple on Sunday evening, the Prime Minister, who addressed a massive rally of the NDA in Madurai, targeted the ruling DMK, alleging "insensitivity" over people's sentiments on the Tirupparankundram lamp lighting issue and said the devotees would eventually win.

In the row over the lighting of the lamp on Deepathoon (stone pillar) atop the Tirupparankundram hill near a Dargah, the Madras High Court permitted Hindus to light the lamp during the Karthigai Deepam festival.

But, the local authorities had disallowed claiming the move would lead to conflict between two faiths. — *PTI*

Bridge collapses in Bihar's Gopalganj, DM orders action

GOPALGANJ, 2 MARCH

A portion of a small bridge which was being constructed collapsed in Bihar's Gopalganj district, an official said on Monday. No one was injured in the incident that occurred on the evening of 28 February. The small bridge was being constructed on the Ghoghari River in Siddhwalia block by the Rural Works Department (RWD).

The District Magistrate of Gopalganj, Pawan Kumar Sinha, who visited the spot on Monday, ordered departmental action, including dismissal of the concerned Assistant Engineer (AE) and Junior Engineer (JE) of RWD. — *PTI*

Girl dies suddenly after injection at drug store in UP's Gorakhpur

GORAKHPUR, 2 MARCH

A nine-year-old girl died allegedly after being administered an injection at a medical store in the Uruwa area here, police said on Monday. The incident took place on Sunday.

The deceased, Divya, a resident of Masuriya village under the Bansgaon police station area, was suffering from a mild cough and fever, police said. The complaint lodged by the girl's mother, Shashikala, said she took her daughter to SN Medical Store in Joharabad at around 4 pm on Sunday for treatment.

Shashikala claimed the store operator administered an injection to Divya immediately after seeing her. Within minutes, her daughter's condition deteriorated rapidly and she died.

After the child's death, the store operator, whose identity has not yet been disclosed by police, locked the store and fled, police said.

Police reached the spot after being informed about the incident and sent the body for autopsy.

A case has been registered based on Shashikala's complaint and efforts are being made to trace the accused.

Uruwa Primary Health Centre in-charge Dr JP Tiwari termed the incident serious and said medical stores are authorised only to sell medicines and are not permitted to administer injections. — *PTI*

Prez Murmu launches women welfare schemes in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday launched the Pink National Common Mobility Card and three other women-centric welfare schemes of the Delhi government.

Addressing the gathering at the 'Sashakt Nari, Samriddh Delhi' programme, Murmu said initiatives like free bus travel and integrated transport access would strengthen women's independence and safety.

At the event held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, the President also launched a scheme providing two free LPG cylinders annually to ration card-holding families on Holi and Diwali. The Rs 129-crore benefit will be transferred directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts. She also launched the Delhi Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana and the 'Meri Poonji, Mera Adhikar' initiative.

President Murmu, Delhi Lt. Governor VK Saxena and CM Rekha Gupta during the 'Lakhpati Beti Yojana' launch in New Delhi —*PTI*

Murmu said empowered women can change the direction of society and the nation. Women's empowerment is not just the government's duty, and society must also play its role, she added. — *PTI*

— PTI

Court frees 14 JNU student protesters

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Fourteen Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) students who were arrested during a protest march last week have been released, student leaders said on Monday, calling the development a relief for the university community.

Those released are JNUSU president Aditi Mishra, vice-president Gopika K Babu, joint secretary Danish Ali, former JNUSU president Nitish Kumar, and AISA All India president Neha, among others.

A Delhi court on Sunday ordered the immediate release of the 14 students who were arrested in connection with a protest at the JNU campus recently.

The court had granted bail to the protesters on 27 February saying that while assaulting police is a serious offence, the accused are students with careers ahead of them.

The police claimed that the students resorted to physical assault, injuring its personnel during the confrontation, following which an FIR was lodged. A total of 51 protesters were detained. — *PTI*

'SYMBOLIC POLITICAL CRITIQUE'

IYC men get bail in AI summit protest case

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

A court here has granted bail to nine Indian Youth Congress workers who were arrested in connection with the "shirtless" protest during the AI summit, saying the protest constituted symbolic political critique and pre-trial detention could be "illicit pre-emptive punishment."

Judicial Magistrate First Class Ravi passed the order on Sunday while hearing the bail pleas of the nine accused, Krishna Hari, Narshimha Yadav, Kundan Kumar Yadav, Ajay Kumar Singh, Jitendra Singh Yadav, Raja Gurjar, Ajay Kumar Vimal alias Bantu, Saurabh Singh and Arbaz Khan.

"The protest constituted a symbolic political critique during a public event: T-shirts with leadership imagery, non-inciteful slogans bereft of communal/regional taint, and transient assembly. No evidence discloses property defacement, or delegate panic; exit was orderly via escort," the court said.

It noted that the pre-trial detention, severed from any imperative necessity and devoid of persisting investigative demands, could be illegal, illicit pre-emptive punishment.

"This would be a profound aberration fundamentally at odds with the bedrock axioms of criminal jurisprudence, which exalt liberty as the governing norm and incarceration as the exception," the court said.

Opposing the bail pleas, Delhi Police submitted that the Constitution grants the right to peaceful protest, but there are also certain conditions.

It argued that the accused Indian Youth Congress (IYC) workers raised slogans calling the India-United States trade deal a compromise in the presence of the international media. When police tried to stop the accused, they attacked the police who sustained injuries. There is medical evidence of the same, the police said. — *PTI*

Close US allies join forces to defend West Asia

Three close allies of the US said Sunday they are ready to join forces to defend their interests in West Asia and stop Iran's retaliatory missile and drone strikes following the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as others around the world raised concerns that the conflict sparked by coordinated US-Israel attacks could spread into a wider war.

Britain, France and Germany said they were prepared to work with the US.

"We will take steps to defend our interests and those of our allies in the region, potentially through enabling necessary and proportionate defensive action to destroy Iran's capability to fire missiles and drones at their source," their statement said.

"We have agreed to work together with the US and allies in the region on this matter."

Massive explosions rocked the Iranian capital for a second day as Israel's military said it was targeting the "heart" of Tehran. Iran pressed on, targeting Israel and US military bases in Gulf states.

Iranian officials hurried to plan a future after the death of Khamenei, who had no designated successor, as some Iranians who had long suffered from political repression celebrated.

On streets around the world, there were protests in outrage or bursts of celebration.

A man holds an Iranian flag as he looks at the damaged Gandhi Hospital, which was hit on Sunday when a strike also struck a state TV communications tower and nearby buildings across the street during the ongoing joint US-Israeli military campaign in Tehran, Iran —PTI

ALLIES WILL WORK WITH US TO DEFEND INTERESTS

The statement by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said they are "appalled" by Iran's "reckless" strikes on their allies, which threaten their service members and citizens in the region.

A drone strike damaged a hangar at a French naval base at the port of Abu Dhabi, France's defence Minister said.

British Defence Minister John Healey said Iranian missile and drone strikes came within a few hundred metres of a group of 300 British military personnel in Bahrain.

Healey also said two missiles were fired in the direction of Cyprus, where the UK has bases, though a Cyprus government spokesman said on social media that those reports were not valid.

Top diplomats from the 27 European Union nations were holding an emergency meeting to discuss the situation and next steps for the bloc.

"The death of Ali Khamenei is a defining moment in Iran's history. What comes next is uncertain," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said.

"But there is now an open path to a different Iran, one that its people may have greater freedom to shape."

Pope Leo XIV said he was "profoundly concerned" about the US and Israeli strikes on Iran and urged both sides to "stop the spiral of violence before it becomes an irreparable abyss."

Explosions in Tehran after Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was killed —PTI

IRAN IS URGED TO RETURN TO ITS SENSES'

Perhaps cautious about upsetting already strained relations with US President Donald Trump, many nations, including several in West Asia, refrained from commenting directly or pointedly on the joint strikes but condemned Tehran's retaliation.

The 22-nation Arab League called the Iranian attacks "a blatant violation of the sovereignty of countries that advocate for peace and strive for stability." That coalition of nations has historically condemned both Israel and Iran for actions it says risk destabilising the region.

"Return to your senses ... and deal with your neighbors with reason and responsibility before the circle of isolation and escalation widens," Anwar Gargash, an adviser to the United Arab Emirates' president, told the Iranian theocracy.

The UAE closed its embassy in Iran and announced the withdrawal of its diplomatic mission after Iranian strikes hit the country.

RUSSIA & CHINA CRITICISE KILLING OF KHAMENEI

Russian leader Vladimir Putin blasted Khamenei's killing, which he called "a cynical violation of all norms of human morality and international law."

"The blatant killing of the leader of a sovereign state and the incitement of regime change are unacceptable," China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in a phone call with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, according to China's official Xinhua News Agency.

Wang said attacking a sovereign state without UN Security Council authorisation undermines the foundation for peace established after World War II.

SOME PROTEST AND OTHERS CELEBRATE

At least 22 people were killed in clashes with police in northern Pakistan and in the southern port city of Karachi after hundreds of protesters stormed the US Consulate there, authorities said.

In Iraq, hundreds wore black and waved flags belonging to Iran-backed Iraqi militias and red flags that symbolise vengeance in the Shiite Muslim faith as they marched across Sadr City to decry the killing of Khamenei.

Anger flashed at the protests held in Istanbul and among Shiite Muslims in India.

Demonstrations were also held in cities including New York, Berlin, Paris and Vienna by members of the Iranian diaspora and their supporters, celebrating the end of Khamenei's rule.

Some demonstrators waved flags of the Iranian monarchy, with Israeli and US flags also on display. —PTI

SALAR سالار

Iran's attack rocks Dubai's safe, tax-free haven image

- Social media videos and photos showed a fire outside the Fairmont hotel on the prestigious man-made Palm Jumeirah island, flames licking at the facade of the famous Burj Al Arab hotel, and smoke rising into the sky near Burj Khalifa, the 2,723-foot skyscraper. There was also a fire at Dubai's Jebel Ali Port, the Dubai International Airport was damaged, and four employees were injured.

The United Arab Emirates has sold itself to foreigners for years as a sunny, safe, tax-free oasis.

That peaceful image was shattered on Saturday as Iranian weaponry rained down on Dubai, setting fire to a five-star resort, threatening the world's tallest building, and killing one person and injuring seven others at the airport in the capital city of Abu Dhabi.

Iran has hit the UAE and several of its neighbours as it strikes back from the major attack by US and Israeli forces, causing fear and chaos in a place that until Saturday was predictably calm.

"This is Dubai's ultimate nightmare, as its very essence depended on being a safe oasis in a troubled region," Cinzia Bianco, an expert on the Persian Gulf at the European Council on Foreign Relations wrote on X. "There might be a way to be resilient, but there is no going back."

Officials tried to reassure residents and visitors that the country's air defence system was among the best in the world, blasting down drones and missiles.

"I know it's a scary time for a lot of the residents," Reem Al Hashimy, minister of state for international cooperation, told CNN. "We don't hear these types of loud sounds. But at the same time, those are sounds of interception. And where there has been damage — that has been primarily debris."

Fallout from the attacks has undermined the Emirates' efforts to de-escalate tensions with Iran despite longtime suspicions of its neighbour across the Gulf. The UAE closed its embassy in Tehran on Sunday.

The oil-rich federation of seven sheikhdoms has relied on its image as a place of serenity to lure wealthy tourists, businesspeople and future residents who want to live largely tax-free in luxury in the desert by the sea. Nearly 90 per cent of the estimated 11 million residents are foreigners.

Real estate firms sell glimmering high-rises and poolside villas to rich Europeans and Americans by promoting a welcoming climate and business-friendly policies, and touting it as one of the safest places on earth.

Hundreds of drone and missile attacks later, though, that reputation has been rocked.

"Last night was pretty surreal," said British racehorse trainer Jamie Osborne, who was in Dubai for the Emirates Super Saturday. "You're standing in the paddock watching missiles get shot through the sky."

The Ministry of Defence said Sunday that air defences had dealt with 165 ballistic missiles, two cruise missiles and more than 540 Iranian drones over two days.

While officials said they intercepted all air attacks Saturday, debris from the knocked-down weapons sparked blazes at some of Dubai's most iconic locations.

Social media videos and photos showed a fire outside the Fairmont hotel on the prestigious man-made Palm Jumeirah island, flames licking at the facade of the famous Burj Al Arab hotel, and smoke rising into the sky near Burj Khalifa, the 2,723-foot skyscraper.

There was also a fire at Dubai's Jebel Ali Port, the city's main sea terminal and a major shipping hub, and the Dubai International Airport was damaged, and four employees were injured, according to the Dubai Media Office.

Kristy Ellmer, who was on a business trip from New Hampshire, said she was staying away from the windows of her hotel but felt relatively safe despite the numerous blasts.

"You hear a lot of explosions at times, you know, there's hundreds of them," she said.

"It's unsettling. We're not used to hearing bombs, right, or missiles."

Louise Herrle, an American tourist whose flight home with her husband from Dubai was scrapped, said it was her third time trying to visit the area.

Previous trips were cancelled by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023.

With their current Abu Dhabi and Dubai tour over, she is less likely to return to the Emirates or the region.

"I would probably be inclined to avoid this part of the world when there's increased tensions; it just explodes so quickly," Herrle said.

Maybe, she said, "the universe was trying to tell us something." —PTI

Fire outside Dubai's Palm Jumeirah island after an Iranian missile rained down on Saturday —SCREENGRAB

LETTERS

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Trump goes to war with Iran despite his anti-intervention stance

US President Donald Trump has taken the US into war with Iran despite decades of self-professed aversion to foreign entanglements, particularly in West Asia, and repeated pledges to focus primarily on the Western Hemisphere with an "America First" agenda.

Trump's predicate for joining Israel in attacks on Iran's leadership, military and critical infrastructure this weekend was that Iran posed unacceptable and imminent risks to US and allied interests.

Similar arguments were made in the aftermath of Trump's action last month to remove former Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro from power in a military strike.

Yet even his closest advisers have been unable to point to any specific threat to the US from Iran that required urgent action. Trump had said a previous strike on Iran had "obliterated" its nuclear capability and the Defence Intelligence Agency said in a report last year that Iran was probably 10 years away from having a missile that could reach the US.

With the top ranks of the Iranian government killed in the first hours of the attacks, a leadership vacuum in Tehran coupled with bitterly divided Iranian diaspora opposition groups could pull the US into exactly the kind of prolonged conflict that Trump has said he wants to avoid.

Less than two days after the Operation Epic Fury began, US lawmakers and Middle East diplomats and experts offered conflicting assessments of the road ahead.

One Middle Eastern diplomat said Arab nations were particularly disappointed that the US and Israel chose to move ahead with the military option while diplomacy remained possible and are "very concerned" about potential escalation. "This is precisely what we did not want," the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

The diplomat said de-escalation is of "paramount" importance because the longer the strikes go on "the worse it will be not only for the region but it will be felt around the world."

Trump supporters, though, disagreed.

"America First is not isolationism," said Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a Trump ally who has long supported military action against Iran. "America First is not head in the sand. America First is not to get entangled. We're not going to have any boots on the ground in Iran. But America First is to kill people who wish us ill with a record of trying to destroy us in the region, to take them off the table."

President Donald Trump's predicate for joining Israel in attacks on Iran's leadership, military and critical infrastructure this weekend was that Iran posed unacceptable and imminent risks to US and allied interests—PTI

Graham and other Trump defenders have argued that the president acts swiftly when necessary and not before exhausting non-military options. They point to his order to eliminate the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps during his first term, his strikes last June on several of Iran's most important nuclear facilities and the Maduro operation.

Senator Tom Cotton, R-Ark., chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, predicted that Republican lawmakers and, more importantly, voters will back Trump even though they support the president's America First policy.

"I suspect you'll see overwhelming support from elected Republicans in the Congress, who are answerable to our voters in places like Arkansas and states all across the country when we're back in the Capitol later this week," Cotton said.

Although Trump has held out the prospect of a return to negotiations with Iran, Democrats who allege the war is illegal because it was not approved by Congress, remain sceptical and point out the difference between Iran and Venezuela, where there was a relatively seamless transition of power.

Senator Mark Warner, D-Va, the ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, said, "I think and fear that we are seeing just the opening salvos of what could be not an in-and-out conflict, but what could be a sustained war in the region. And our record of sustained wars in West Asia leaves something to be desired."

Senator Mark Kelly, D. Az. and a combat veteran, said he wanted to see a strategy from the president.

"My concern here, you know, going forward is what happens now… I don't want to see a wider conflict in West Asia."

A leading voice pushing for a congressional vote on Trump's action, Senator Tim Kaine, D-Va, added, "Haven't we learned something from 25 years of war in West Asia? Have we learned nothing?" —PTI

Israel bombs kill 31 in Lebanon after Hezbollah attack

Hezbollah ends strike lull, vows vengeance

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

Smoke rises from Israeli strikes on Dahiyeh in south Beirut on Monday —*PTI*

Israel launched airstrikes across Lebanon on Monday after Hezbollah fired missiles and drones at Israel, opening a new front in the West Asia conflict. Lebanon said at least 31 were killed and 149 wounded in the strikes, mainly affecting southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's government condemned Hezbollah's overnight attack as "illegal", demanded the group hand over its weapons, and called an emergency meeting in response.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam called on the Lebanese military to prevent the firing of projectiles and detain anyone involved.

Israel targeted alleged Hezbollah militants and infrastructure in Beirut and southern Lebanon. Israeli officials declared Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem a "target for elimination", though said a ground invasion was not currently under consideration.

However, an Israeli security source told Saudi channel Al-Hadath that the offensive would be "broad and comprehensive" and could include a ground incursion, with "no immunity" for Hezbollah figures or supporters.

Explosions shook Beirut's southern suburbs, in areas largely controlled by Hezbollah, with residents reporting shattered windows and low-flying warplanes overhead. Israel said Hezbollah had "joined the campaign" alongside Iran.

Hezbollah said it carried out the attack in retaliation for the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and for what it described as repeated Israeli aggressions. The strikes by Hezbollah on Israel were the first in over a year.

Lebanese officials had previously urged Hezbollah to avoid entering the conflict, fearing another devastating war.

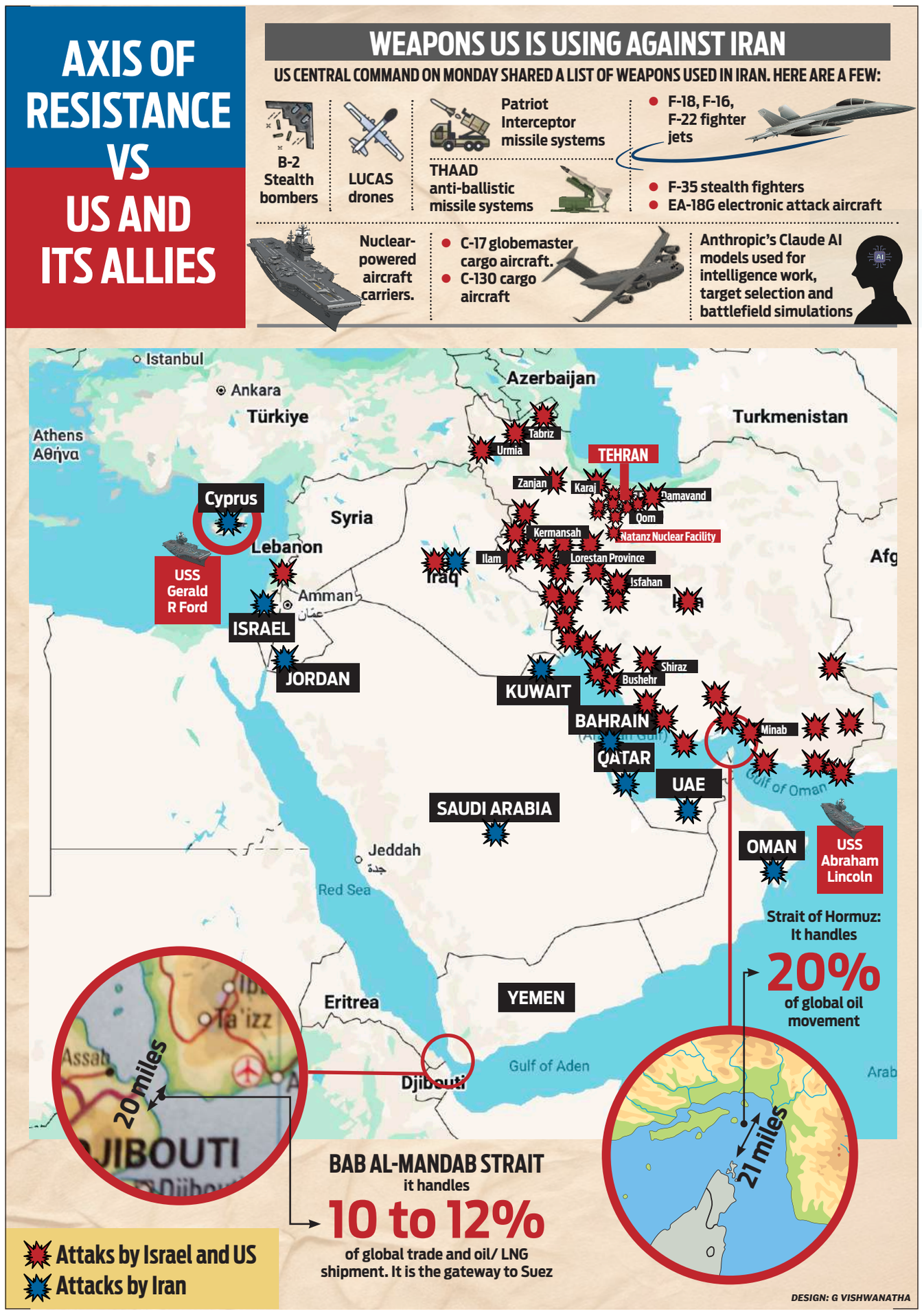
A US-brokered ceasefire that nominally ended the last Israel-Hezbollah conflict in November 2024 has been fragile, with Israel continuing near-daily strikes aimed at preventing Hezbollah from regrouping. —*PTI*

RUSSIA-UAE TALK; CHINA DENIES ARMS DEAL WITH IRAN

Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the crisis with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, criticising what the "armed aggression" against a sovereign state. Meanwhile, China denied to finalisising a deal to supply Iran CM-302 anti-ship missiles, calling the claims false and urging de-escalation as US naval forces mass near Iranian waters.

AMAZON DATA CENTRE IN UAE CATCHES FIRE FROM HIT

Amazon's data centres in the UAE caught fire after being hit by 'objects' during military strikes involving Iran and the US, Amazon said on Sunday. Fire department shut off power to the facility as they extinguished the fire. By grouping centres into zones with independent power and cooling, it enable service continues even when one facility is affected.



IRAN'S GANDHI HOSPITAL HIT IN ISRAELI STRIKES

In a military offensive against Iran, Israeli strikes have reportedly hit Iran's Gandhi Hospital in north Tehran. The strike happened on Sunday, the second day of joint US-Israeli military offensive against Iran. Although the hospital was badly damaged, patients were evacuated, Reuters reported. Video footage released by Fars and Mizan news showed debris-strewn floors and abandoned wheelchairs inside the hospital. Israeli officials stated that their attacks were directed at Iran's nuclear and military facilities.

Iranian-backed militias hit US allies

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

Iran and Iranian-backed militias widened their missile and drone campaign on Monday, striking Israel and several Arab states, allegedly hitting the US Embassy in Kuwait. Fire and smoke were seen rising from the embassy grounds.

ATTACK IN CYPRUS

Early on Monday, Cyprus said an uncrewed drone caused "limited damage" at a British air base on its southern coast. The incident followed British Prime Minister Keir Starmer saying the UK would support the US against Iran.

In Iraq, the Shiite militia Saraya Awliya al-Dam claimed responsibility for a drone strike targeting US troops at Baghdad airport, a day after it said it had attacked an American air base in Irbil. The group is among several Iran-aligned militias operating in Iraq. Neither Washington nor Baghdad immediately commented.

The US military said B-2 stealth bombers struck Iranian ballistic missile facilities using 2,000-pound bombs. US President Donald Trump claimed nine Iranian warships had been sunk and that the navy's headquarters was "largely destroyed".

DESERTED IRANIAN STREETS

Inside Iran, Tehran's streets were largely deserted during airstrikes. The paramilitary Basij force established checkpoints across the capital, witnesses said. In the northern city of Babol, a student speaking anonymously described riot police on the streets following the death of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, voicing uncertainty over how to respond to both domestic repression and foreign attacks.

In Israel, emergency services confirmed missile impacts in Jerusalem and at a synagogue in Beit Shemesh, where nine people were killed and 28 wounded, taking the national death toll to 11.

The World Health Organizsation urged all sides to protect civilians and medical facilities. —*PTI*

IRAN ALLEGES JOINT US-ISRAELI STRIKES ON ITS NATANZ NUCLEAR FACILITY

VIENNA, 2 MARCH

Iran has alleged, that its nuclear complex at Natanz was struck during joint US-Israeli operations, on Monday at a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency Governors' Board.

Iran's envoy, Reza Najafi, told reporters: "Again they attacked Iran's nuclear facilities yesterday," confirming Natanz as the site.

International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said the security situation was "very concerning", saying a radiological release has serious consequences, including large-scale evacuations. He said the agency had knowledge of nuclear material and stood ready to respond if needed.

Grossi noted several countries facing military attacks operate nuclear facilities, heightening risks. However, he said there was no indication any Iranian nuclear installation had been damaged. No rise in radiation is detected in neighbouring states, though monitoring remain on alert. —*ANI*

FBI PROBES TEXAS BAR SHOOTING THAT KILLED 2 PEOPLE AS ACT OF TERRORISM

AUSTIN, 2 MARCH

A gunman at a Texas bar killed two and wounded 14 people on Sunday, a day after the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran. The FBI is investigating the shooting by a man wearing clothes bearing the Iranian flag, with the words "Property of Allah", as a potential act of terrorism.

The shooting happened outside Buford's Backyard Beer Garden, a popular student spot near the University of Texas at Austin. Austin police shot and killed the gunman, identified as Ndiaga Diagne, 53.

The suspect drove past the bar several times before stopping and firing from his SUV at people on the patio and outside, according to Austin Police Chief Lisa Davis. He then parked, exited with a rifle, and began shooting at pedestrians until officers shot him.

FBI acting Special Agent Alex Doran said that a clear motive is not yet determined, 'indicators' found on the gunman and in his vehicle have led authorities to investigate the shooting as a potential act of terrorism. —*PTI*

SCHOOLS STAY CLOSED

PHOTO: IG

Zendaya & Tom Holland are married

LOS ANGELES, 2 MARCH

Hollywood star Zendaya has reportedly tied the knot with longtime partner Tom Holland. The news was revealed by her longtime stylist and close friend, Law Roach, during the Actor Awards on Sunday. Engagement rumours began after Zendaya, 29, was seen wearing a ring at the 2025 Golden Globe Awards. Holland, 29, later confirmed their engagement by correcting a reporter who called Zendaya his girlfriend, clarifying, "Fiancee." The couple met on Marvel's 'Spider-Man: Homecoming' in 2016 and went public in 2021. The pair are known for their private approach to their personal life. They are yet to release an official announcement.—*PTI*

Afghanistan claims air strikes on Pakistan's military infra

KABUL/ISLAMABAD, 2 MARCH

Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence announced on Monday multiple strikes on major military facilities across Pakistan ***-Ministry of Defence***

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry on Monday said that its Air Force has conducted coordinated aerial operations against multiple Pakistani military installations.

In a statement on social media, the ministry said, the strikes were aimed at major Pakistani military facilities, including Nur Khan Airbase in Rawalpindi, 12th Division headquarters in Quetta, and Khwazai Camp in Mohmand Agency of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Several other strategic command centres across Pakistan were also targeted during the operation. Based on preliminary assessments, the strikes successfully caused significant damage to the intended targets, Afghanistan ministry statement further claimed.

These operations were carried out in response to the recent aerial incursions by the Pakistani military, which struck Kabul and Bagram, the statement said. The ministry stressed that any further breach of Afghan airspace or "acts of aggression" by Pakistan will invite a swift, decisive, and proportionate response.

In a separate development, over 50 educational institutions in the districts bordering Afghanistan were closed on Monday following a drone attack on a school in northwest Pakistan's restive province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, officials said.

The incident occurred in Ghalanai tehsil of Mohmand district after an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) crashed into the building of Governor Model High School.

Mohmand Deputy Commissioner (DC) Yasir Hassan confirmed the incident and said that security forces were "attempting to shoot down" another drone that was detected in the airspace. —*PTI/Agencies*

Myanmar govt grants amnesty to 10,000 prisoners

BANGKOK, 2 MARCH

The head of Myanmar's military government granted amnesty to more than 10,000 prisoners and reduced the sentences of others to mark a holiday, state-run media reported on Monday.

There was no sign that former leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was ousted in the military takeover in 2021, would be freed. The amnesty comes two weeks before parliament is set to convene for its first session in more than five years, following the recent election that critics said was neither free nor fair.

State-run MRTV television reported that Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, pardoned 10,162 prisoners, including 7,337 convicted under a counter terrorism law, on Peasants' Day, a national holiday honouring farmers. —*PTI*

169 killed as insurgents raid South Sudan village

JUBA, 2 MARCH

At least 169 people were killed after insurgents raided a village in a remote area of South Sudan, officials said Monday. It's the latest bout of sporadic violence that has left Sudan on the verge of full-blown civil war.

The victims, including 90 civilians, were attacked on Sunday in Abiemnom County in Ruweng. Women and children were among the dead, in addition to the dozens of combatants who were killed.

The UN Mission in South Sudan, known as UNMISS, said in a statement that 1,000 people sought shelter at its base after the attack. The UNMISS statement cited 23 wounded in the attack.

The killings are part of an escalating wave of violence gripping South Sudan as government forces loyal to President Salva Kiir battle armed loyalists to opposition leader Riek Machar.

The armed youths who carried out the latest attack are believed to have ties with Machar's group, known as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in Opposition. —*PTI*

Machado to return to Venezuela

CARACAS, 2 MARCH

Venezuelan opposition leader and 2025 Nobel Peace Prize winner **María Corina Machado** said on Sunday that she will return to Venezuela in the coming weeks ahead of elections which she aims to win.

In a social media post, Machado called on her supporters to "strengthen the unity of Venezuelans that began with the primaries," a reference to her win in the 2023 vote aimed at establishing a candidate to compete against former president Nicolas Maduro.

Acting President Delcy Rodríguez has warned that Machado "will have to answer" if she returns to the country. —*PTI*

Investors' wealth erodes by ₹6.59L cr as mkts tumble

Sensex tanks 2,743.46 pts, while Nifty tumbles 575.15 pts

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Equity investors became poorer by Rs 6.59 lakh crore on Monday as markets faced a massive drubbing amid rising tensions in West Asia that weighed heavily on sentiments.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,743.46 points or 3.37 per cent to 78,543.73 in early trade. It later ended at 80,238.85, down 1,048.34 points or 1.29 per cent.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 575.15 points or 2.28 per cent to 24,603.50 in intra-day trade. The benchmark later settled 312.95 points or 1.24 per cent down at 24,865.70.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 6,59,978.08 crore to Rs 4,56,90,693.19 crore (USD 5 trillion).

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 7.29 per cent to USD 77.85 per barrel.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in a coordinated US-Israeli airstrike on Tehran early Saturday, with the Iranian state media confirming the death on Sunday.

Iran began firing missiles at Israel and the Arab countries in the region in retaliation for the killing of its supreme leader.

From the Sensex pack, InterGlobe Aviation, Larsen & Toubro, Adani Ports, Maruti, Asian Paints, and Reliance Industries were among the biggest laggards. Bharat Electronics, Sun Pharma and ITC were the only gainers.

The BSE smallcap select index tanked 1.81 per cent, and the midcap select index dropped 1.67 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, services tumbled 3.81 per cent, consumer durables (2.30 per cent), auto (2.23 per cent), consumer discretionary (2.16 per cent), oil & gas (2.15 per cent), industrials (2.14 per cent) and energy (2.06 per cent).

A total of 3,561 stocks declined, while 821 advanced and 146 remained unchanged on the BSE. —*PTI*

Defence stocks up by 8%

Defence stocks such as Ideaforge Technology and Paras Defence closed higher on Monday. Shares of Ideaforge Technology jumped 7.66 per cent, Paras Defence and Space Technologies surged 5.95 per cent, Bharat Electronics climbed 2.09 per cent, Astra Microwave Products advanced 1.62 per cent, Taneja Aerospace & Aviation shot up by 1.34 per cent, Hindustan Aeronautics went up by 0.96 per cent and Bharat Dynamics (0.22 per cent) on the BSE. —*PTI*

Aviation, travel shares decline

Shares of airline companies, tour and travel-related service providers tumbled on Monday amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, leading to the closure of airspace. The stock of InterGlobe Aviation ended 6.25 per cent lower after falling 7.50 per cent during intra-day trade on the BSE. Shares of SpiceJet also dropped 5.72 per cent and in intraday trade, it had declined 9.20 per cent. Shares of Yatra Online tumbled 9.59 per cent, Easy Trip Planners slumped 7.08 per cent, TBO TEK dived 4.04 per cent. —*PTI*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW (US): 48,844.08 **(1.37%)**

S&P 500 (US): 6,819.00 **(1.19%)**

Nasdaq (US): 22,668.21 **(0.92%)**

Nikkei (Japan): 58,057.24 **(1.35%)**

Hang Seng (China): 26,059.85 **(2.14%)**

DAX (Germany): 24,678.34 **(2.40%)**

FTSE 100 (UK): 10,754.93 **(1.43%)**

CAC 40 (Paris): 8,394.50 **(2.17%)**

KOSPI (South Korea): 6,244.13 **(1%)**

Escalating West Asia tension sends oil prices soaring

NEW YORK, 2 MARCH

- Brent crude, the international standard, was at $79.41, a 9 per cent increase from $72.87, reaching a seven-month high.

Oil prices rose sharply Monday as US and Israeli strikes on Iran, along with retaliatory attacks on Israel and US military sites around the Gulf, disrupted the global energy supply chain.

Traders anticipate that oil exports from Iran and other Middle Eastern countries will slow or halt.

Attacks, including on two vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz, have limited countries' ability to export oil, with prolonged disruptions likely to push crude and petrol prices higher, energy experts warn.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the US benchmark, was trading at $72.79 per barrel early Monday, up 8.6 per cent from about $67 on Friday.

Brent crude, the international standard, was at $79.41, a 9 per cent increase from $72.87, reaching a seven-month high.

Higher prices will impact consumers through increased petrol and grocery costs amid existing inflation pressures.

Approximately 15 million barrels daily — about 20 per cent of global oil — pass through the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most vital oil chokepoint, according to Rystad Energy.

Iran, which temporarily shut parts of the strait in mid-February for military drills, caused prices to jump 6 per cent.

In response, eight OPEC+ nations, including Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the UAE, announced they would increase crude production by 206,000 barrels daily from April, exceeding analysts' expectations.

Rystad's Jorge León said, "Market concern is whether barrels can move, not spare capacity. If flows are constrained, additional production offers limited relief."

Iran exports about 1.6 million barrels daily, mainly to China, which may seek alternative supplies, potentially raising prices further. —*PTI*

Rupee crashes 41P, settles at 91.49 against USD

— FREEPIK

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

The rupee saw a steep loss of 41 paise to settle at 91.49 against the US dollar on Monday after US and Israeli attacks on Iran intensified worldwide risk aversion, setting crude oil prices on fire and demand for the American currency soaring. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.23 and touched the intraday low of 91.65 against the greenback. The currency ended the session at 91.49 against the dollar, registering a steep loss of 41 paise from the previous closing level.On Friday, the rupee lost 17 paise to settle at 91.08 against the dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index was trading 0.82 per cent higher at 98.41. —*PTI*

Fino Payments denies betting link, GST evasion

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Fino Payments Bank stated it did not evade GST dues and is fully compliant with regulations, following the arrest of MD and CEO Rishi Gupta by the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI). The bank clarified, "Investigation by DGGI was related to program managers associated with multiple banks, not the bank's GST compliance." Gupta was arrested on Friday for violations under the CGST and SGST Act. The bank emphasised it does not promote betting activities, and onboarding processes follow regulatory requirements, with all invoices reflecting actual services. Industry bodies like PCI and SPF expressed support and concern over enforcement proportionality, with PCI stressing governance continuity. —*PTI*

Shree Ram Twistex shares tumble over 31% in mkt debut

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Shares of cotton yarn manufacturer Shree Ram Twistex Ltd on Monday ended with a discount of over 31 per cent against the issue price of Rs 104. The stock began trading at Rs 70, a decline of 32.69 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. Later, it ended at Rs 73.45, down 29.38 per cent. At the NSE, the stock started trading at Rs 68, a drop of 34.61 per cent. Shares of the firm ended at Rs 71.40, a discount of 31.34 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 293.62 crore. TThe 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,048.34 points or 1.29 per cent to end at 80,238.85. The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 312.95 points or 1.24 per cent to 24,865.70.—*PTI*

— PTI

Silver hits ₹3L/kg; Gold nears ₹1.73L/10g

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Precious metal prices skyrocketed up to 12 per cent in the national capital on Monday, with silver surging to Rs 3 lakh perkg, while gold nearing Rs 1.73 lakh per 10g as investors flocked to safe-haven assets following an escalation of hostilities in the Middle East.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal surged by Rs 32,000, or 11.94 per cent, to Rs 3,00,000 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Friday's closing level of Rs 2,68,000 per kg.

In the bullion market, price of gold of 99.9 per cent purity climbed Rs 8,100, or 4.92 per cent, to Rs 1,72,800 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes).

It had settled at Rs 1,64,700 per 10g in the previous market session.

"Gold and silver prices witnessed a sharp surge on Monday, as rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East triggered aggressive safe-haven buying.

"The escalation followed coordinated military strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran over the weekend, resulting in the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, rattling global financial markets and prompting a swift shift towards bullion," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

In the international market, spot gold gained USD 116.38, or 2.21 per cent to USD 5,394.28 per ounce.

Meanwhile, spot silver was trading 1.43 per cent higher at USD 95.19 per ounce. —*PTI*

L&T shares fall more than 6% amid West Asia tensions

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

— AI

Shares of Larsen and Toubro Ltd (L&T) fell more than 6 per cent in early trading on Monday following the Iran-Israel-US war.

L&T, India's largest infrastructure corporation, has extensive exposure to the Middle East.

The overseas sector accounted for up to Rs 3.6 lakh crore, or 49 per cent of the total order book. More than 80 per cent came from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East region. L&T's order book exposure to the Middle East is 37 per cent, and order inflows are 33 per cent in the first nine months of fiscal year 2026.

The company stated that it is closely monitoring the situation and has confirmed that all of its employees, workers, and assets on the ground are secure. The company issued a travel advisory to all affected personnel, instructing them to avoid any non-essential travel or movement.

L&T recently won an order worth up to Rs 10,000 crore across West Asia and India.

Following the company's third-quarter earnings, L&T's management maintained its full-year guidance across criteria, stating that it would exceed its order inflow growth guidance of 10 per cent for the year. —*Agencies*

'Rising tension risk to global energy'

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Escalating hostilities in West Asia are increasing risks for India and Asian importers, as military strikes and retaliatory attacks disrupt vital energy routes, Moody's Analytics said Monday.

The US and Israel launched strikes on Iran, prompting Tehran to retaliate with missiles and drones targeting Israel and US military-occupied countries, including the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Media reports suggest the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial energy conduit, has effectively closed, affecting about a third of global seaborne crude oil exports and 20 per cent of liquefied natural gas shipments.

India, the world's third-largest oil importer, sources roughly half of its oil through this strait.

Moody's warned, "This raises the risk of further disruptions in the Red Sea and across the wider Middle East," adding that airspace closures are also impacting trade. —*PTI*

Mfg growth jumps to 4-month high in February

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

India's manufacturing sector activity growth jumped to a four-month high of 56.9 in February, supported by substantial improvement in domestic demand, a monthly survey said.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 55.4 in January to a four-month high of 56.9 in February.

Demand buoyancy, marketing initiatives and rising client requirements underpinned another expansion in new business intakes.

One area where growth took a step back was new export orders.

Where external sales rose, monitored companies cited gains from Asia, Europe West Asia and the US.

Cost pressures remained benign, rising at a moderate rate.

With total new orders continuing to expand sharply, manufacturers in India purchased additional materials to supplement production and add to the inventories. —*PTI*

— CLEAN MAX

Clean Max shares end nearly 18% market debut

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Shares of Clean Max Enviro Energy Solutions Ltd, a commercial and industrial renewable energy provider, on Monday ended with a discount of nearly 18 per cent against the issue price of Rs 1,053. The stock started trading at Rs 952.20, down 9.57 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. It later ended at Rs 867.90, registering a drop of 17.57 per cent. At the NSE, shares of the firm listed at Rs 960, a discount of 8.83 per cent. The stock ended at Rs 867.50, a decline of 17.61 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 10,161.30 crore. The Rs 3,100-crore IPO had a price band of Rs 1,000-1,053 per share. —*PTI*

AROUND 1,05 LAKH CARS

Indonesia halts vehicle orders from Tata Motors & Mahindra

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

Indonesia has temporarily suspended orders of around 1,05,000 vehicles from India's Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra after facing resistance from government policymakers, a Bloomberg report said.

According to the news agency's report, Tata and Mahindra had informed the stock exchanges about the deal separately, calling it the biggest export order an Indian automaker has ever secured.

PT Tata Motors Distribusi Indonesia, an Indonesian subsidiary, had ordered 70,000 vehicles consisting of 35,000 Yodha pick-ups and 35,000 Ultra T.7 trucks from India's Tata Motors.

On 26 February, an announcement made by Ferry Juliantono said that it would suspend the imports of vehicles — a mix of 4x4s and six-wheeler lorries. Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra Spokespersons stated that the firms have not received any formal notice or information regarding the matter from the Indonesian government, and declined to comment on it. Indonesia's car sales went down 7.2 per cent to 8,03,687 units in 2025 due to the weak household spendings & cautious lendings. —*Agencies*

Qualcomm unveils AI wearable chip

BARCELONA, 2 MARCH

Qualcomm announced the Snapdragon Wear Elite Platform at MWC 2026, a new computing system designed to embed artificial intelligence (AI) into wearable devices, sources said.

According to sources, compatible with WearOS by Google, Android, and Linux, it features a Neural Processing Unit (NPU) and low-power connectivity options to support on-device AI.

Qualcomm describes the platform as part of an interconnected ecosystem where multimodal AI agents operate across devices to anticipate needs and understand context.

The Snapdragon Wear Elite includes the Qualcomm Hexagon NPU, supporting up to billion-parameter AI models at the edge, enabling features. —*Agencies*

RIL, Adani & Google pledge $240B investment for AI

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Reliance Industries, Adani, Google, Lightspeed Ventures and Tata are among the top investors that cumulatively made commitment of USD 240 billion investment in India during the India AI Impact Summit 2026.

Over USD 200 billion in AI-related investments are expected across infrastructure, foundation models, hardware and applications.

The India AI Impact Summit Declaration was endorsed by 92 countries and international organisations.

The New Delhi Frontier AI Impact Commitments were announced by 13 leading global and Indian frontier model developers to promote trustworthy and inclusive AI deployment.

Reliance Industries pledged USD 110 billion over seven years towards AI-focused infrastructure, Adani Enterprises announced plans to invest USD 100 billion by 2035, General Catalyst announced a USD 5 billion investment commitment over five years, while Lightspeed Venture Partners announced USD 10 billion in investments.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced investments including new India-US subsea cable routes and a USD 15 billion AI hub in Visakhapatnam. —*PTI*

Sindhu set to miss All England C'ships; Lakshya and others set for stiff fight

BIRMINGHAM, 2 MARCH

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu is set to miss the All England Championships starting here on Tuesday after being stranded in Dubai amid the US bombing of Iran and the resultant airspace closure in the Gulf region.

Travel disruptions have marred the build-up to the Super 1000 event, with Sindhu stuck in Dubai since Saturday after flights were suspended amid the US and Israeli strikes on Iran and the subsequent retaliation by Tehran.

Sindhu and her team, including Indonesian coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama, had a narrow escape after an explosion near their place of stay. They were subsequently moved to a secure location as tensions flared across the Gulf. The Indian ace was scheduled to face Thailand's Supanida Katethong in the opening round, but with Dubai airspace and airport continuing to be closed, she will be forced to pull out of the tournament.

BWF is also keeping a close watch, maintaining "real-time oversight of the situation and stand ready to assist delegations experiencing delays or route changes."

"This includes reviewing and preparing potential contingencies within the competition schedule should any players experience delayed arrival," it said. While Sindhu's participation remains uncertain, some of her fellow shuttlers have managed to reach Birmingham via alternate routes of Singapore and Africa. However, it remains to be seen how the long and taxing travel will impact their preparations. India's top men's singles contender, Lakshya Sen and rising youngster Ayush Shetty have reached without any travel issues. While Lakshya has drawn world No. 1 Shi Yu Qi of China, Ayush is up against Indonesia's Alwi Farhan in the opening round.

For Lakshya, a former semi-finalist and runner-up here, it will be another tough test against Shi, against whom he has lost four of his five previous meetings against the Chinese. Ayush, the US Open Super 300 champion, will look to turn the tide against Farhan, having lost three of their five encounters, including the most recent one at the Indonesia Masters in January.

In women's singles, Malvika Bansod faces a stiff opening challenge against Tokyo Olympics champion Chen Yufei of China. *—PTI*

Cricket is a team game: Gambhir

Sanju needed a break after NZ series to release pressure

KOLKATA, 2 MARCH

For Gautam Gambhir, the essence of team sport is acknowledgement of every contribution, big or small, which, according to him, was missing in Indian cricket for long.

Had Shivam Dube not smashed a couple of boundaries in the penultimate over, no one would have spoken about Sanju Samson's match-winning 97 against West Indies on Sunday, said the Indian head coach.

Gambhir asserted that till he is the coach, every contribution will get an honourable mention.

"Glad you're talking about every contribution because for many years, we've only spoken about certain contributions. This is a team sport, and this will always remain a team sport," Gambhir said, speaking in his inimitable style, although without referring to certain contributions.

Sanju Samson -PTI

"For me, Shivam's two boundaries are as important as Sanju's 97 because if he hadn't hit those two boundaries, you wouldn't even spoken about it (97-run knock). "The big contribution makes headlines. The small contribution, the contribution that can help the team win, crossing that line, is very important." Gambhir has underlined his team philosophy, and till he is around, there won't be any special contribution."T20 cricket is about instinct and backing your instinct as well. Whatever knowledge I have about the game and the T20 format, I try to give it to the captain, try to help him out as much as I can.

Sanju Samson is a man of unquestionable talent. Still, his wretched run in the bilateral series against New Zealand forced the team management to give him a break to ease the mounting pressure ahead of the T20 World Cup, head coach Gautam Gambhir said after the Kerala player took the hosts into the semi-finals with his epic knock.

"Obviously, he had a tough series against New Zealand. So sometimes it's important to give him (Samson) a break as well, because you want to get the guy off that pressure situation as well," head coach Gambhir replied to a query from PTI at the post-match press conference.

Bavuma on players avoiding handshakes

South Africa's inspirational Test and ODI leader, both on and off the field, Temba Bavuma, believes that players not shaking hands is not a good endorsement for the game.

Bavuma, who is part of the commentary panel for the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, spoke to PTI on a range of topics including the no handshake policy in India-Pakistan games, the Proteas' unbeaten run in the tournament, his own future, and Indian batters' struggles against spin across formats besides reflecting on his Test team's historic triumph in India last year. *—PTI*

Ganguly backs Samson as white-ball regular

Former captain Sourav Ganguly on Monday backed Sanju Samson to feature consistently in India's white-ball squads and expressed surprise at the criticism about the swashbuckling keeper-batter in the run-up to the T20 World Cup. Samson smashed an unbeaten 97 off 50 balls -- his first fifty in 13 innings to anchor India's 196-run chase in what was a virtual quarterfinal against the West Indies here on Sunday. Terming it an outstanding knock, Ganguly said: "He's a very good player. He should consistently play for India in white-ball cricket 100 per cent. "It was a virtual quarterfinal, and to be 97 not out shows his quality.

PRAGUE INT'L CHESS FESTIVAL

Gukesh blunders to hand Abdusattorov another victory

PRAGUE, 2 MARCH

The fortunes of World Champion D Gukesh did not change for the fifth day running as the Indian blundered from a position of strength to lose to nemesis Nodirbek Abdusattorov at Prague International Chess Festival here.

Just a month back, Gukesh had lost to Abdusattorov through a blunder from a decent position during the Tata Steel Masters, but the fifth round here was even more heartbreaking as the Indian did everything right for the major part of the middle game and seemed like cruising through to an easy victory.

Employing a new strategy as black, Gukesh tormented the white king early in the opening and created enough weaknesses for the computer to volunteer that he was closing in on his first victory in the Masters section of the tournament.

However, the ticking of the clock had its final say as the Indian faltered in the closing stages of the first time-control.

Abdusattorov almost returned the favour, but this was simply not Gukesh's day as another blunder saw white advancing his pawn to glory. *—PTI*

Diksha Dagar finishes T-20 at NSW Open

WOLLONGONG, 2 MARCH

Diksha Dagar, the lone Indian to make the cut, finished with yet another solid round to pick up a top-20 finish at the Women's NSW Open, here. Diksha, who began the week with a 6-over 77 and was in danger of missing the cut, finished the week with a round of 68 on Sunday that gave her an 8-under total of 276 for a T-20 finish. Agathe Laisne was crowned the Ladies European Tour (LET) winner after overcoming a crowded leaderboard on a dramatic final day. The French golfer followed up her third round 64 (-7) with a 65 (-6) in the final round to secure a one-shot victory over Thailand's April Angurasaranee and Korean amateur Soomin Oh on 16-under par. *—PTI*

AFC AC 2027: King Fahd Stadium to host opener and final

RIYADH, 27 FEB

Riyadh's King Fahd Sport City Stadium will host the opening and closing matches of next year's Asian Cup, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) officials announced on Monday. The Asian Cup, scheduled between January 7 and February 5, 2027, will be a dress rehearsal for Saudi Arabia, which will host the FIFA World Cup in 2034. "The King Fahd Sports City Stadium... will provide the backdrop for both the eagerly anticipated Final as well as the opening match, featuring hosts and three-time Asian champions Saudi Arabia," the AFC said in a statement in Kuala Lumpur. The 70,000-plus venue in Riyadh will also host four group stage battles, a round of 16 tie, and a quarterfinal match before the final in early February, the AFC added.—*PTI*

Boxers question fairness in selection

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Even as women boxers Jyoti Gulia and Neeraj Phogat questioned the fairness of the evaluation process to select the Indian team for the Asian boxing championships, the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Monday rejected their claims, saying the system was fair.

In separate letters written to the Sports Authority of India (SAI), former World youth champion Jyoti, who was ranked third with a total of 224.45 points as against Nikhat Zareen who topped the 51kg chart with 261.9 in the assessment, and World Boxing Cup Finals bronze medallist Neeraj, who placed fifth with 225.55 against top-ranked Ankushita Boro (267.73) in 65kg, raised doubts over transparency of the process.

While Neeraj cited several instances of selection-related 'irregularities,' including those during the evaluation for the Asian championships, Jyoti claimed that she was the No.1 boxer throughout different assessment tests in her weight class. *—PTI*

PCB CONSIDERING FINANCIAL PENALTIES ON PAK PLAYERS

LAHORE, 2 MARCH

Livid with the Pakistan team's early elimination from the T20 World Cup, the country's cricket board is contemplating financial penalties on the players for their below-par show.

A reliable source said that while reports of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) deducting remuneration of the players were incorrect, appropriate action is being considered in the wake of the team's exit from the Super Eight stage of the event co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka. "No final decision has been taken on this as yet. But yes, it is under consideration to financially penalise the players," he confirmed to PTI without revealing the details. *—PTI*

AFGHANISTAN TOUR OF INDIA

AIFF seeks 15-yr commercial rights bids for games

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Afghanistan will kick off their upcoming tour of India with a one-off Test match, followed by three one-day internationals in June, the BCCI said on Monday.

"Afghanistan will play one Test match followed by a three-match One-Day International (ODI) series. The Test match will be played in New Chandigarh from 6 June to 10 June 2026," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said in a release. The Test match, however, is not a part of India's World Test Championship cycle.

THE MATCHES ARE

- Test: New Chandigarh 6-10 June
- 1st ODI: Dharamshala 14 June 1:30 pm
- 2nd ODI: Lucknow, 17 June 1:30 pm
- 3rd ODI: Chennai 20 June 1:30 pm.

It is understood that now the white ball focus will shift towards 50-over cricket, looking at the 2027 World Cup, and hence three ODIs have been arranged.

"The ODI series will commence on 14 June, 2026, in Dharamshala, with the subsequent matches scheduled in Lucknow (17 June) and Chennai (20 June).

All ODI matches will begin at 1:30 PM IST. *—PTI*

Tennis stars in Dubai among athletes facing travel issues

LONDON, 2 MARCH

Former U.S. Open tennis champion Daniil Medvedev has indicated he's one of what the ATP Tour calls "a small number of players and team members" it is trying to help leave Dubai as the war in the Middle East causes a widespread travel shutdown.

Medvedev's Instagram account reposted on Monday a report from a Russian-language tennis outlet, Bolshe, which said he was safe and staying at a friend's apartment in Dubai, amid flight cancellations after winning the ATP event there last week.

"The health, safety and well-being of our players, staff and tournament personnel is our priority. We can confirm that a small number of players and team members remain in Dubai following the conclusion of the recent ATP 500 event," the ATP Tour said in a statement Monday. *—PTI*

AIFF issues 15-year commercial rights tender for ISL

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Monday invited bids for the commercial rights of both men's and women's club competitions for a period of 15 years minimum, starting with the 2026-2027 season.

The AIFF has offered two packages for bidding on men's and women's club competitions.Package A consists of the Indian Super League (or seniormost men's league) and the Federation Cup (or seniormost cup competition). Package B comprises Indian Women's League (IWL) and IWL 2, and at the bidder's option, Women's Federation Cup which is likely to be introduced later on.The bids for the commercial rights of the recently rechristened Indian Football League (earlier I-League) were not included in the latest Request for Proposal (RFP)."We want the commercial rights for a minimum duration of 15 years.

If the bidder agrees it can be done for 20 years also, it is an option," a top AIFF official told PTI.However, unlike in the past, the RFP will not be made publicly available. Instead, interested parties will have to purchase the document for Rs 2.5 lakh from the AIFF."It is clarified that the RFP shall be shared by way of email only upon receiving the payment the RFP must be purchased by the entity that desires to bid.

Such right to bid may not be transferred to any affiliates of the entity making payment," the AIFF said."Further, any bid submitted in response to the RFP by an entity that has not made the payment described hereinabove shall be summarily rejected and not considered for any evaluation under the RFP."A pre-bid conference has been scheduled for March 11, while the last date of bid submission is 19 March. *—PTI*

AMID WEST ASIA WAR

Iran's WC participation in US is in doubt

TEHRAN, 2 MARCH

The president of Iran's soccer federation says he does not know if the national team can play World Cup matches in the United States following the surprise U.S. and Israeli bombardment of his country.

"What is certain is that after this attack, we cannot be expected to look forward to the World Cup with hope," Mehdi Taj told sports portal Varzesh3 as Iran traded strikes with Israel as part of a widening war prompted by the bombardment.

The U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran continued for a second day on Sunday after the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei threw the future of the Islamic Republic into uncertainty and raised the risk of regional instability.

Iran's national soccer team poses for a photo ahead of a 2022 FIFA World Cup -*PTI*

Iran has been drawn in Group G at the World Cup and is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21 before finishing the first round against Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

The U.S. is hosting the tournament with Canada and Mexico from 11 June to 19 July. Fans from Iran were already banned from entering the U.S. in the first iteration of the travel ban announced by the Trump administration.

FIFA did not immediately reply to an email from The Associated Press over the current situation regarding Iran's participation in the World Cup. *—PTI*

Messi's first goals of season inspire a big Miami rally

ORLANDO, 2 MARCH

Lionel Messi scored twice in a four-goal second half, defender Telasco Segovia added a goal and two assists, and defending champion Inter Miami rallied to beat Orlando City 4-2 on Sunday night, winning for the first time at Inter and Co. Stadium.

Messi took a pass from Segovia and scored in the 57th minute to pull Inter Miami (1-1-0) even at 2-2, and Segovia scored unassisted in the 85th for the lead.

Messi put the finishing touch on the victory when he scored off a free kick in the 90th minute. The reigning MVP's first two goals of the season give him 52 in his first 55 regular-season MLS matches — 51 of them in his last 49 appearances.

Marco Pasalic took a pass from Ivan Angulo and scored in the 18th minute to give Orlando City (0-2-0) a 1-0 lead. Pasalic has scored in four straight matches against Inter Miami.

Defender Griffin Dorsey set up Martin Ojeda for a goal six minutes later for a 2-0 advantage that stood through halftime. *—PTI*